THE EXEGESIS OF 1 COR 15, 24-28
FROM MARCELLUS OF ANCYRA TO THEODORET OF CYRUS

BY

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Marcellus of Ancyra's fascination with 1 Cor 15, 24-28, a difficult Pauline eschatological text, is well known. And (as Karl Holl has observed') Marcellus had a remarkable influence on his opponents. The full history of this influence is yet to be written; what follows makes a contribution to that history.

A recent monograph by Eckhard Schendel treats the exegesis of 1 Cor 15, 24-28 in East and West up to the end of the fourth century.2 Despite this valuable monograph, however, there are several reasons for approaching this topic again. One is to bring the treatment into the fifth century. Schendel stops somewhat abruptly with Gregory of Nyssa, whereas Theodoret of Cyrus is a more satisfactory conclusion. This allows the inclusion of Didymus of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Severian of Gabala. A second—and more significant—reason is to distinguish more carefully between different works attributed to the same author. In the case of Marcellus of Ancyra, for example, Schendel draws indiscriminately on the extant fragments of Marcellus’s work against Asterius (before 334) and the De incarnatione et contra Arianos, which Martin Tetz has attributed to Marcellus and dated ca. 360. Moreover, Schendel does not consider the Epistula ad Antiochenos, which has also been attributed to Marcellus, or the work Aduersus Arium et Sabellium, sometimes attributed to Gregory of Nyssa.3

In what follows, only works by Greek Fathers are considered, and only those which contain more than a passing reference to 1 Cor 15, 24-28. Epiphanius of Salamis is omitted, since Schendel’s treatment of him is fully adequate. The writings are considered in strict chronological order. In each case, an effort is made to find the topic or issue which the author emphasized, rather than to try to reconstruct his complete exegesis of the verses in question.
1. Marcellus of Ancyra, *Contra Asterium*

Marcellus wrote his refutation of the Arian Asterius during the time between the Council of Nicaea and his deposition in 334 (or perhaps 330-331).\(^4\) It is extant only in fragments, preserved mostly in the refutation composed by Eusebius of Caesarea.\(^3\) It was this work of Marcellus’s that started the fourth-century controversy about the end of Christ’s reign and his subjection to the Father.

Marcellus’s text of Paul differs slightly from that of standard editions. In the extant fragments he quotes vv. 24, 25, 27a and 28b. In v. 24b, which he cites once, he inserts τὸ διὰ τὸν θάνατον εἰκόνικτον after πάσαν ἀρχήν;\(^6\) this fits in with his view of the history of salvation, as will be seen below. In v. 25b, which he cites three times, he omits πάντας,\(^7\) apparently without significance. Much more significant is his consistent omission of ὁ υἱὸς from v. 28, which he cites three times;\(^8\) Marcellus preferred to reserve the title “Son” for the incarnate Christ, and (in fr. 41) says that it is precisely as Logos that he will be subjected.\(^9\)

In Marcellus’s understanding of the passage in question, the key term is βασιλεία (βασιλεύων). Marcellus was best known as the heretic who proposed that Christ’s kingdom would end;\(^10\) and he is probably the reason why the phrase “of whose kingdom there will be no end” appears in the creed of Constantinople.\(^11\)

Marcellus has a doctrine of two kingdoms, an eternal kingdom and a temporary kingdom. The temporary kingdom is properly the kingdom of Christ.\(^12\) The Lord Christ has a beginning of his reign—not more than four hundred years ago, Marcellus says.\(^13\) It is precisely in his humanity that the incarnate Christ began to reign: Marcellus writes, for example, βασιλεύει ἐν ἀνθρωπίνῃ σαρκί; and elsewhere, ἐκάτα ἀνθρωπον αὐτοῦ οἰκονομία τε καὶ βασιλεία.\(^14\) (Marcellus’s peculiar use of anthropos will be treated below.) This kingdom is also partial (ὃ ἐν μέρει: αὐτῆ βασιλεία).\(^15\) It will endure until Christ has destroyed every rule of the devil and authority and power.\(^16\) Then he will hand over the kingdom to God who established him as king;\(^17\) “He no longer needs this partial kingdom, since he is king of all at once, for he reigns with God the Father whose Word he was and is.”\(^18\)

The fragments in which Marcellus uses parts of 1 Cor 15, 24-28 also contain most of his references to the devil, and a peculiar use of the word anthropos.\(^19\) The most striking sentence is in fr. 117: “For the Word itself, in its own right, did not have a beginning of its reign. But